

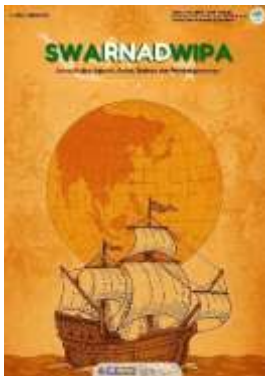
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Freemasonry in Indonesia, 1942–1965: The Decline of the Organization during the Japanese Occupation and the Soekarno Administration

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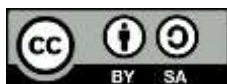


Abstract

This study discusses the development and decline of Freemasonry in Indonesia from the Dutch East Indies colonial period to the administration of Soekarno. Freemasonry developed through Dutch colonial networks and exerted influence among the priyayi elite, intellectuals, and modern organizations such as Boedi Oetomo. This research employs a library research method by utilizing various historical sources, journals, archives, and official documents. The findings indicate that Freemasonry contributed to the development of modern thought and Western education in the Dutch East Indies, but it also generated controversy with Islamic organizations such as Sarekat Islam and Muhammadiyah, which viewed the organization as a threat to Islamic values and indigenous identity. The decline of Freemasonry began during the Japanese occupation in 1942, when the activities of Western organizations were restricted and their assets were confiscated. This condition continued during the administration of Soekarno, which strengthened nationalism, anti-colonialism, and the ideology of Pancasila through policies such as PEPERTI in 1961 and Presidential Decree Number 264 of 1962, which officially prohibited Freemasonry and its affiliated organizations in Indonesia.

Keywords: freemasonry, japanese, soekarno.

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INTRODUCTION

Freemasonry was a social and cultural phenomenon that developed during the Age of Enlightenment in Europe, a period marked by the growth of rationalism and humanism (Margaret C. Jacob, 2001). As one of the oldest and most influential fraternal organizations, Freemasonry has historical connections with ancient craft traditions and the development of modern intellectual thought (David Stevenson, 1988). The organization evolved as an alternative forum for discussing the values of humanity, morality, and universal brotherhood outside traditional institutions. The characteristics of Freemasonry are marked by the Enlightenment ideology it promoted, emphasizing rationality, universal humanism, and secularism (Jessica Harland-Jacobs, 2014).

Historically, Freemasonry originated from associations of stonemasons (masons) during the Middle Ages, which were spread across various regions of Europe. Rebold stated that Masonic organizations had developed since the early seventh century CE

(Annandale Charles, 1901). Several associations, such as the Colleges of Architects in Italy, the Pontifical Brothers in France, and the Freemasons in England and Scotland, later evolved into broader fraternal organizations and obtained a number of special privileges from the Pope. Despite experiencing tensions with church authorities and European conservatives due to its members' support for freedom of thought (В.В. Прилуцкий, 2022), The colonial government tended to demonstrate tolerance toward Freemasonry, viewing it as a partner in the "modernization" of the indigenous elite (Kroon).

During the era of colonialism, the network of Freemasonry expanded widely alongside the expansion of European powers into various parts of the world. The organization developed not only in Europe as its original center of emergence, but also spread to the Americas, Africa, and Asia through trade routes, migration, and colonial administration. The existence of Freemason lodges often followed colonial centers of power and strategic port cities that served as meeting points for colonial officials, merchants, military personnel, and intellectuals. In Asia, the spread of Freemasonry also reached the Dutch East Indies, now known as Indonesia. In the context of the Dutch East Indies, the organization developed in major cities such as Batavia, Semarang, Surabaya, and Bandung, and became a social space for the colonial elite and segments of the educated indigenous population during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Freemasonry in the Dutch East Indies developed as part of a global expansion driven by commercial interests and European social networks. Following the establishment of the Grand Lodge of the Netherlands in 1756, the organization began extending its influence into the Far East, particularly in regions under European control such as Ceylon and Negapatnam on the Coromandel Coast. In the Dutch East Indies, Batavia became the main center for the spread of Freemasonry. The first lodge, La Choisie, was established by J.C.M. Radermacher in 1764. The establishment of this lodge marked the introduction of Enlightenment ideas into the colonial territory. By the end of the eighteenth century, Freemasonry lodges had expanded to various colonial cities in Java and Sumatra, thereby connecting the archipelago to the currents of modern European thought (Faizal Arifin, 2025).

Colonialism in Indonesia left enduring political and cultural legacies that profoundly influenced the way of life of the nation (Peluso & Harwell, 2001; Young, 2018). The colonial powers created tensions between religious values and secularism, as well as between religion and nationalism, which at times led to extreme consequences. Discussions concerning these three elements became increasingly complex due to the secret involvement and influence of Freemasonry.

After attacking Attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Japan began to dominate Southeast Asia, including the Dutch East Indies. Japanese forces landed in Tarakan in January 1942 and successfully occupied Batavia on March 5, 1942. The Dutch subsequently surrendered through the Kalijati Agreement on March 8, 1942. At the beginning of the occupation, Japan gained sympathy from the Indonesian people because it was perceived as bringing hope for Indonesian independence (Wicaksono, Pandu, 2021). Japan's hostility toward the Allied powers in colonial territories, including the Dutch East Indies, also affected various aspects of social, economic, political, and Western cultural life in the colonies. The Japanese occupation government imposed restrictions on various organizations considered capable of threatening Japanese authority and existence, one of which was Freemasonry. This phase marked the beginning of the decline of the Freemasonry movement in Indonesia. The situation continued during the post-independence era when the administration of Soekarno strengthened the ideology of Pancasila and anti-colonial nationalism, resulting in restrictions on organizations that were considered to be Western-oriented.

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State Gazette Number 18 of 1961 during the administration of Soekarno reflected the government's efforts to strengthen national unity and maintain Indonesia's political stability in the post-independence period. At that time, the government sought to build a national identity based on Pancasila and the spirit of anti-colonialism in order to confront various foreign influences that were considered capable of disrupting national unity. In this context, the state began to supervise and restrict organizations that were viewed as having connections to colonial interests or foreign ideologies, including Western-oriented organizations. This policy became part of Soekarno's strategy to preserve national integration and strengthen Indonesia's sovereignty amid the global political dynamics of the Cold War era.

RESEARCH METHODS

Historical facts constitute the totality of empirical activities that occurred in the past (Walsh, 1967); therefore, an appropriate methodology is required in conducting historical research. The study entitled "*Freemasonry in Indonesia 1942–1965: The Decline of the Organization during the Japanese Occupation and the Soekarno Administration*" employs a historical methodology consisting of the stages of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Rambe, Khoirul Bariah, & Samosir, 2026), as follows:

1. Heuristics

The researcher collected sources related to the development and decline of Freemasonry in Indonesia during the period 1942–1965. These sources include colonial archives, newspapers from the Japanese Occupation and Old Order periods, Freemasonry organizational documents, books, scholarly journals, and other relevant previous studies.

2. Source Criticism

The collected sources were examined for their authenticity and credibility through external and internal criticism. Historical source criticism is generally conducted through these two approaches. External criticism aims to determine whether a historical document is authentic or forged, while internal criticism seeks to identify the reliability and truthfulness of the information contained in the source (Renier, 1987). External criticism was applied to verify the authenticity of documents, whereas internal criticism was used to assess the content, objectivity, and relevance of the information to the focus of the study.

3. Interpretation

The verified historical facts were analyzed to understand the factors contributing to the decline of Freemasonry, both as a result of Japanese occupation policies that prohibited Western organizations and the national political dynamics during the Soekarno administration.

4. Historiography

The final stage involved systematically and chronologically organizing the research findings to produce a historical account of the decline of Freemasonry in Indonesia during the period 1942–1965.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Influence of Freemasonry in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia)

The presence of Freemasonry in the Indonesian archipelago was a logical consequence of the expansion of Dutch economic and military power through the

Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie. Unlike its development in Europe, where it often came into conflict with monarchical or ecclesiastical authority, in the archipelago Freemasonry emerged as an integral part of the social structure of the colonial elite itself. The first lodge in the archipelago, La Choisie, was established in Batavia in 1762 by Jacobus Cornelis Mattheus Radermacher. He was not an ordinary figure; he was a high-ranking official of the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie as well as the son of the first Grand Master in the Netherlands. The establishment of this lodge marked the beginning of an era in which Western Enlightenment values were imported into a colonial ecosystem that still retained feudal characteristics (Th. Stevens, 1994).

British influence brought a new dimension to the development of lodges in Java. The organization's focus shifted toward a greater emphasis on scientific research, philanthropy, and the documentation of local culture. This was reflected in the close relationship between prominent Freemasonry figures and the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, in which many lodge members also became leading figures in archaeological and sociological research in the Dutch East Indies.

During this period, the lodges transformed into luxurious centers of social activity, often becoming the grandest buildings in a small town or afdeeling. Equipped with modern libraries and exclusive discussion rooms, the lodges became visual symbols of Western cultural and intellectual superiority over the indigenous society, which was regarded as feudal (Heather Sutherland, 1979). The existence of these buildings, referred to by local communities as "Rumah Setan" ("House of Devils"), created psychological distance while simultaneously arousing curiosity among the educated indigenous elite regarding what actually took place behind their closed walls.

A radical change in the membership structure of Freemasonry in the Indonesian archipelago occurred during the transition into the twentieth century alongside the implementation of the Ethical Policy. This policy not only opened access to Western education for the indigenous population, but also broke down racial barriers at the entrance of the lodges. The inclusion of figures such as Abdul Rivai, a pioneering physician and journalist, as well as members of Javanese aristocratic families into the "Free Masonic Order" marked a new phase in which the lodges began to function as spaces for cross-racial elite assimilation (Paul W. van der Veur, 1976). Substantially, Freemasonry in the archipelago transformed into one of the primary and most systematic agents of secularization in the colony. This strategy was carried out not only through discussions behind lodge walls, but also through formal educational channels. Masonic foundations established prestigious schools, one of the most notable being the *Carpentier Alting Stichting* in Batavia. Through this institution, a purely secular Western educational curriculum was introduced to the children of the elite in the Dutch East Indies.

2. Freemasonry, Boedi Oetomo, and the Conflict with Islam

According to Pradipto Niwandhono, the early period of Boedi Oetomo from 1908 to 1926 was an era of "association," a phase marked by the introduction and development of Western ideas within the Indonesian nationalist movement. This process subsequently contributed to the emergence of the idea of Indonesian nationalism. During this period, various political parties and organizations also began to appear, whose memberships consisted of a combination of indigenous people and Western society (Pradipto Niwandhono, 2014). In his speech entitled "Theosofische in Verband met Boedi Oetomo" ("Theosophy in Relation to Boedi Oetomo"), Labberton discussed religious issues, the

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objectives of the Theosophical movement, and its connection to the future of the Javanese nation. Through this speech, Labberton succeeded in attracting several members of Boedi Oetomo to join the Theosophical organization (Artawijaya, 2010). The close relationship between Boedi Oetomo and Freemasonry can also be observed through the role of Paku Alam V, who was known to be a Freemason and who supported the organization of Boedi Oetomo congresses in Surakarta. In addition, several congresses held in Freemason lodges were attended by nationalist activists who were also members of Freemasonry. The historian of the Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (LIPI), Abdurachman Surjomihadrojo, in the foreword to the book *The Awakening of Indonesian Nationalism: Boedi Oetomo 1908-1918* by Japanese researcher Akira Nagazumi, stated, "Paku Alam exerted influence on the organization of Boedi Oetomo congresses, particularly those connected with the Masonic (Freemasonry) movement."

The close relationship between Boedi Oetomo and Freemasonry was also recorded in a work entitled *The Freemason in Boedi Oetomo*, written by C.G. van Wering in 1979. In his writing, van Wering explained the involvement of elite and intellectual groups from the Javanese priyayi class who were actively engaged in Boedi Oetomo while simultaneously being members of Freemasonry. Van Wering's study was later cited in the biography of Dr. Radjiman Wediodiningrat entitled *DR. K.R.T. Radjiman Wediodiningrat: Perjalanan Seorang Putra Bangsa 1879-1952*.

A number of Javanese priyayi and figures affiliated with Freemasonry and Theosophical organizations in the Dutch East Indies were often associated with criticisms and attitudes considered derogatory toward Islam. Some of these were reflected in statements claiming that Boven Digul was better than Mecca, criticisms of the Islamic practice of polygamy, and views that regarded Kejawan or Javanese religious traditions as superior to Islam. These views were expressed through writings in the mass media as well as lectures delivered within their organizational circles.

Tensions intensified when members of Freemasonry and Theosophy who were active in Boedi Oetomo came into conflict with activists of Sarekat Islam. M.C. Ricklefs, in his work *Modern Indonesian History*, stated that the Theosophical movement during the Dutch East Indies period was involved in various polemics and criticisms directed at Islam. Therefore, the study of this issue requires an examination of contemporary archives and primary documents in order to understand it in a more objective and chronological manner (M.C. Ricklefs, 2008).

An analysis of the conflict between the doctrines of Freemasonry and Islam must begin with an in-depth examination of the concepts of divinity upheld by both entities. Freemasonry adopts the concept of the *Grand Architect of the Universe* (T.G.A.O.T.U), which is deistic and universal in nature, a theological formulation intentionally designed to allow its members to interpret God according to their respective personal beliefs without being bound to the dogmas of any particular religion (Albert G. Mackey, 1914). This concept was regarded as a serious threat by Islamic scholars in the Priangan region because it was considered to diminish the absolute nature of Tawhid, which is founded upon divine revelation.

The existence of Freemasonry and Theosophical networks in the Dutch East Indies faced opposition from Islamic groups, one of which was Sarekat Islam (SI). This opposition emerged due to ideological differences as well as the attitudes of several

Freemasonry figures toward Islam and the SI movement. In a *Gubernemen Boemipoetra* meeting in 1913, Radjiman Wediodiningrat, who was known to be a member of both Theosophy and Freemasonry, delivered a speech entitled *Een Studie Omtrent de S.I* ("A Study on Sarekat Islam"). In the speech, Radjiman described SI members as lower-class individuals, lacking education, and more inclined to prioritize emotion in organizational activities. He also stated that the Javanese capabilities and culture possessed by members of Boedi Oetomo were superior to the Islamic teachings embraced by activists of Sarekat Islam. This attitude became evident again during the Boedi Oetomo Congress of 1917, when the aspirations of Muslims active within the organization were rejected by Radjiman Wediodiningrat. He even stated that Javanese society, particularly in Central Java, could not necessarily be considered entirely Muslim. These statements reflected the tensions between the nationalist-priyayi groups closely associated with Freemasonry and Islamic movements during the Dutch East Indies period.

The rapid development of Freemasonry among the priyayi elite of the Dutch East Indies also provoked responses from modern Islamic movements. In addition to Sarekat Islam, KH. Ahmad Dahlan established Muhammadiyah as an effort to confront the influence of Western thought and the anti-religious attitudes that were developing among indigenous intellectuals. According to Alwi Shihab, concerns regarding the influence of Freemasonry among the elite layers of society became one of the factors that encouraged the establishment of Muhammadiyah on November 18, 1912. Abdul Mukti Ali explained that the establishment of Muhammadiyah was motivated by four factors: the condition of religious life, which was considered impure; the ineffectiveness of religious education; the activities of Christian missionaries; and the emergence of indifferent and anti-religious attitudes among indigenous intellectuals (Abu Mujahid, 2013). In this context, intellectual groups influenced by Freemasonry were viewed as one of the challenges faced by Islamic movements during that period.

3. The Impact of Japanese Policies and the Administration of Soekarno

Freemasonry in the Indonesian archipelago did not exist as an isolated entity; rather, it formed an integral part of a global network controlled by the Grand Orient of the Netherlands in The Hague. This well-organized international coordination enabled the rapid exchange of human resources, financial support, and progressive ideas, ultimately making the lodges one of the most modern and efficiently managed organizations in the Dutch East Indies of their time (Albert G. Mackey, 1914). However, these strong international connections later became a fatal liability when global geopolitics shifted dramatically on the eve of World War II. The arrival of Japanese military forces in the archipelago in 1942 marked the sudden and traumatic end of the golden age of Freemasonry. Japan, which was ideologically allied with Nazi Germany—a regime also known for its hostility toward Freemasonry in Europe—immediately implemented repressive measures. The Japanese authorities prohibited all lodge activities, confiscated luxurious physical assets, and imprisoned their members, both Europeans and several indigenous elites, in harsh concentration camps (Paul W. van der Veur, 1976).

In its efforts to consolidate power, Japan cleverly exploited the anti-Western and anti-Masonic sentiments that had long existed among the grassroots population. The Japanese authorities spread extensive propaganda to gain the sympathy of local Islamic groups by portraying Freemasonry as an instrument of Allied espionage as well as an

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agent of international Zionism aimed at undermining the moral order of the East. This narrative proved highly effective because it resonated with the religious sensitivities and rising nationalism of the period (Benedict Anderson, 1972).

The destruction of Masonic physical and social infrastructure during the Japanese occupation left the organization paralyzed and made it extremely difficult for it to fully recover after Indonesian independence. Although Freemasonry attempted to carry out limited consolidation efforts after 1945, the increasingly strong anti-Western sentiment during the era of Guided Democracy caused the organization to lose its legitimacy. The culmination came in 1961 (later reinforced through Presidential Decree No. 264 of 1962), when President Soekarno officially prohibited Freemasonry along with its affiliated organizations, such as Rotary International and Lions Clubs International, on the grounds that they were considered incompatible with the national character and were suspected of serving as extensions of foreign imperialist interests (Th. Stevens, 1994).

State Gazette Number 18 of 1961 issued by the President of the Republic of Indonesia and later reinforced through Presidential Decree Number 264 of 1962 compelled Freemasons in Indonesia to cease their activities. The justification provided was that their principles and objectives were considered incompatible with Indonesia's national identity. Not only Freemasonry, but also several other organizations were affected by the prohibition, including Rotary International, Moral Re-Armament, and the Rosicrucian association. By officially declaring Freemasonry prohibited in Indonesia, its properties ultimately came under the control of the Indonesian state. As a progressive leader, Soekarno possessed a strong vision of national unity, which he believed to be a powerful instrument for building Indonesia.

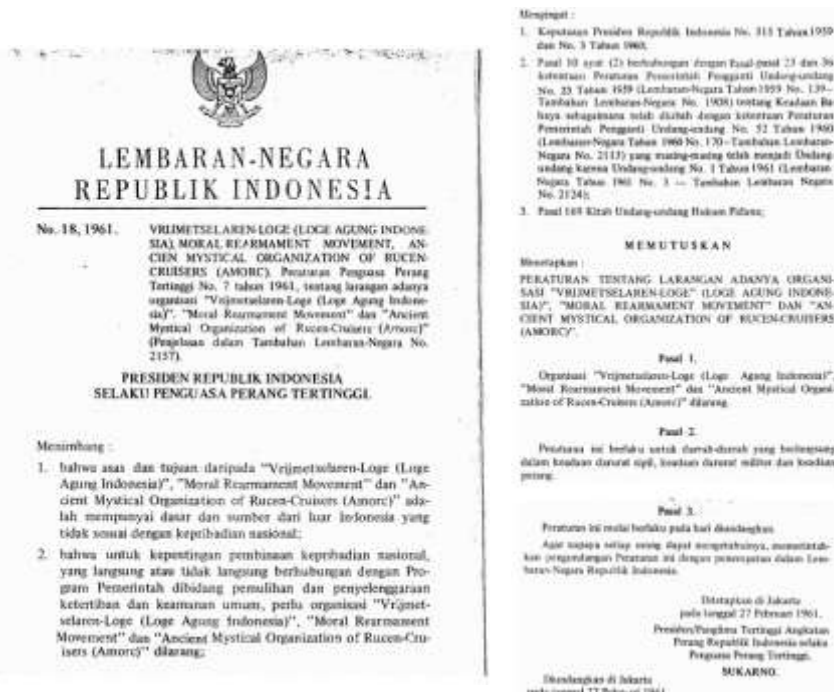


Figure 1. State Gazette Number 18 of 1961 concerning the prohibition of Freemasonry organizations

During the administration of Soekarno, Indonesia was undergoing a revolutionary phase in various aspects of life, including politics, society, and culture. In 1959, Soekarno delivered a speech entitled "*The Rediscovery of Our Revolution*" (*Penemuan Kembali Revolusi Kita*), which emphasized the direction of Indonesia's revolutionary struggle through the concept of the Political Manifesto (*Manipol*). This manifesto was adopted as the ideological foundation of the state in building national unity and rejecting influences considered contrary to the spirit of the Indonesian Revolution.

As a continuation of this policy, in 1961 the government issued the Regulation of the Supreme War Authority (PEPERTI), which asserted that organizations deemed inconsistent with Indonesia's Political Manifesto could be prohibited and dissolved. In addition to the dissolution of organizations, various facilities and assets under their control were also taken over by the state. This policy demonstrated the strong efforts of Soekarno's government to maintain political stability, strengthen national ideology, and limit the influence of organizations considered to have connections with colonialism or Western ideologies, including Freemasonry.

CONCLUSION

Freemasonry in Indonesia developed as part of Dutch colonial expansion and brought the influence of Western thought, secularism, and modernization to the Dutch East Indies. The organization maintained connections with the priyayi elite, intellectual circles, and organizations such as Boedi Oetomo, but it also generated conflicts with Islamic groups such as Sarekat Islam and Muhammadiyah, which viewed Freemasonry as being contrary to Islamic values and indigenous identity. The decline of Freemasonry began during the Japanese occupation in 1942, when Western organizations were restricted, and continued under the administration of Soekarno through the PEPERTI policy of 1961 and Presidential Decree Number 264 of 1962, which officially prohibited Freemasonry on the grounds that it was incompatible with Indonesia's national identity and associated with Western colonial influence.

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